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WEITERE INFORMATIONEN OK

An unending variety of topics

Saturday, January 07, 2006

"History and the Security of Property"

A draft of my paper "History and the Security of Property" is available. I'd love to get your comments.

Posted by Nick Szabo at 11:38 AM

3 comments:

Brian Dunbar said...

This is possibly beyond the scope of your paper but ...

Indeed, interior continental regions easily reached by horse tended to be given over to much less productive nomadic grazing. Security constraints were probably what prevented any sort of crop from being grown.

Some of those regions were unsuited for agriculture before the introduction of machinery. For those regions grazing was the best use that could be made.

I am only familiar in a general way with with the American Great Plains as an example. Before the introduction of the horse that area was a perilous one indeed. The Amerind lived there only because they'd been pushed out of more productive regions. If your Amerind culture farmed - you didn't do it on the Plains.

8:47 PM

george thompson said...

You have some good examples backing your thesis, but it's a big topic with many other parts of history that remain to be explained. For exampple, can the so-called micro democracies be explained by the topography or military technology of classical Greece and the American West, or does the explanation lie in particular cultural traditions? Also, I'm curious as to how long the law takes to adapt to the military and economic conditions of the day, or if that adaptation is always towards the optimal security vs. efficiency tradeoff.

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Nick Szabo

"A premier thinker about history, law and economics, and the lessons they have for security." -- Adam Shostack, Emergent Chaos

"Szabo comes out with these essays that leave me in awe." -- Brian Dunbar

"Reading material that is eclectic, challenging and endlessly fascinating." -- Sean McGrath, Propylon

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You mention public choice problems -- wouldn't those prevent optimal tradeoffs?

11:12 AM

Nick Szabo said...

Brian, that's a great observation. I suspect introduction of the horse made things even worse (because they provided further advantage to roving bandits against stationary bandits and farmers) until farmers started setting up fences and enforcing property rights with guns and states.

George, I have indeed only scratched the surface. I suspect micro-democracies can be explained partially by military technology and organization (phalanx and long spears for the Greeks, militias or posses and guns for the America frontier) and partially by shared cultural heritage (English and Americans purposefully tried to revive classical and medieval republican ideas as well as home-grown democratic institutions such as juries and town hall meetings).

I also suspect that law takes a very long time to adapt to an optimal tradeoff of economic efficiency and security (often centuries), and takes longer to adapt the larger and more complicated the state. Furthermore, I think this adaptation may be very sub-optimal in a larger jurisdiction, such as the ancient Roman Empire or China, probably for the reasons of your final point -- I suspect that public choice problems become worse in larger states. Mancur Olson argues that public choice problems become worse as a state becomes more mature, thus for example explaining the long decline of the Roman Empire and the long stagnancy of the Chinese Empire.

You're right, this is a big topic!

11:35 AM

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